One Hundred Years Ago, On June 17, 1839, The Menard County Circuit Court, An Important Point On The Lincoln Circuit, Convened At Petersburg For The First Time.

PETERSBURG, ILL.
JUN 17
9 - AM
1939

Old Menard County Court House
Formerly At Petersburg

not in M (1939)

Dr. Louis A. Warren

Lincoln National Life
Foundation

Fort Wayne Indiana

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"Small town, great reunion."
Rabelais

On February 15, 1839, Menard county was established by the Illinois Legislature in session at Vandalia. It took its name from Pierre Menard, First Lieutenant Governor of the State and a pioneer trader as well. Petersburg, a modest little town, well situated geographically, was designated as the county seat and here the first term of the Menard County Circuit Court began on June 17, 1839.

Into the town came Abraham Lincoln and his itinerant colleagues in company with Stephen H. Treat, judge of the Eighth Judicial District. Petersburg had no regular court house and so the store of Grimsley and Levering served as the temporary court house. At a later date a church was called into the same service, but by 1843 a brick court house of the Kentucky tobacco barn type was erected.

Petersburg was not new to Lincoln for he assisted in surveying the town in 1836, while engaged as a deputy surveyor. Two miles to the east was Salem hill and its cluster of log houses, soil that bore a rich harvest, indeed. The importance of Petersburg soon overshadowed New Salem and soon it was aban-

doned and became a ghost town. Today it is resurrected from the dead and present day Petersburg owes much of its importance to the close proximity of this important Lincoln shrine.

To the north, four miles, Ann Rutledge, shadowy figure of Lincoln's romantic side, lay buried in the Old Concord Cemetery, until at the turn of the century her ashes were removed to the cemetery on the outskirts of Petersburg itself.

At Petersburg, Lincoln again came into close contact with many of his New Salem friends, and this perhaps accounts for the volume of business he is known to have enjoyed at Menard Court. On the present court house square in Petersburg, a marker reminds the passerby that greatness once walked here. It reads:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
TRAVELED THIS WAY AS HE RODE
THE CIRCUIT OF THE EIGHTH
JUDICIAL DISTRICT.

THEODORE S. CHARRNEY

The cachet symbolic of this event is the first Menard County Court House, erected in 1843 and visited regularly by Lincoln for the following four years. Prepared by the POOR RICHARD PRESS. 5053 Montana Street. Chicago, Illinois.

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